Consultation on Library Opening Hours Announced

As a result of the savings required by the Draft Budget for 2015/16 the Board of Libraries NI has agreed reluctantly to review library opening hours across Northern Ireland.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure has provided a measure of protection to the library sector in the Draft Budget 2015/16 which means there will be no library closures but opening hours in a number of libraries may be reduced or will operate with a different pattern. A public consultation on the proposed revised opening hours will take place from 18 February 2015 to 17 April 2015.

The Consultation Report suggests that public libraries across Northern Ireland continue to be categorised into bands based on level of use. The proposal is that libraries in Band One would open for 54 hours per week; those in Band Two would open for 50 hours per week; those in Band Three would open for 45 hours per week; those in Band Four would open for 40 hours per week; those in Band Five would open for 35 hours per week; those in Band Six would open for 28 hours per week; those in Band Seven would open for 25 hours per week; and libraries in Band Eight would be open for 18 hours per week.

Irene Knox, Chief Executive of Libraries NI, said:

“The Draft Budget for 2015/16 requires Libraries NI to save 7.5% which equates to £2.385 million. No libraries will close as a result of these savings. Libraries NI was obliged to reduce opening hours temporarily in November 2014 at short notice when it was required to make in-year savings and we now need to regularise opening hours to ensure equity. The temporary opening hours will continue to apply until the new hours are introduced in the autumn.

“Reducing opening hours is very difficult for our customers and our staff and the Board of Libraries NI deeply regrets having to take this course of action. We will consult openly with people during this process and we are inviting people to engage
with us regarding the policy and proposals. In all of our actions we want to be fair to customers, to libraries and to our staff.”

Public consultation on the policy and proposals will commence on 18 February and close on 17 April 2015. Survey questionnaires will be available in libraries and on the Libraries NI website – www.librariesni.org.uk. A draft equality impact assessment and draft rural impact assessment will be available on the website for comment, along with the proposal document. Once the Board has taken its decision on the way forward, there will be a further period of local engagement with customers in every library regarding the actual pattern of opening hours.

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

• Any proposed changes if approved would not be implemented prior to October 2015.
• Libraries NI is the public library service for Northern Ireland. It came into being on 1 April 2009 as part of the Review of Public Administration. Its services are regionally planned and locally delivered. Its service priorities are reading and reader development, information and learning, heritage, culture and creative development and children and young people’ services.
• Further information is available on the Libraries NI website www.librariesni.org.uk
• All enquiries should be addressed to press@librariesni.org.uk or alternatively please contact:
  Julie Campbell 028 9263 3360 / 07850205453 or
  Deborah Mulholland 028 9263 3361